

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

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AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

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USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

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AMCONSUL BELFAST

AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

AMCONSUL LIVERPOOL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LONDON 07616

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, UK

SUBJECT: POLITICAL PACE IN BRITAIN BEGINS TO QUICKEN

SUMMARY. LAST WEEK OPPOSITION LEADER HEATH ANNOUNCED
THAT WILLIAM WHITELOW WOULD TAKE OVER FROM LORD
CARRINGTON AS CHAIRMAN OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY. HEATH
SUBSEQUENTLY ANNOUNCED A MODEST RESHUFFLING OF CONSERVA-
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TIVE FRONTBENCH RESPONSIBILITIES AND THEN, IN A HIGHLY

PUBLICIZED WEEKEND SPEECH, HE STRONGLY IMPLIED THAT THE

TORIES WOULD BE TAKING A MORE AGGRESSIVE ROLE IN ATTACKING GOVERNMENT POLICIES IN PARLIAMENT IN THE WEEKS BETWEEN NOW AND THE SUMMER RECESS. THE POLITICAL PACE IN BRITAIN IS QUICKENING AND MOST OBSERVERS NOW EXPECT A FALL GENERAL ELECTION, THOUGH THERE IS RECOGNITION THAT A NUMBER OF FACTORS COULD CAUSE THIS TO SLIP INTO THE NEW YEAR. END SUMMARY.

1. WHITELAW'S APPOINTMENT AS PARTY CHAIRMAN DID NOT COME AS A SURPRISE. HIS PUBLIC POPULARITY, BLUFF AMIABILITY, EVIDENT SINCERITY AND SERVICES TO HIS PARTY AND COUNTRY IN NORTHERN IRELAND MADE HIM A LOGICAL CHOICE FOR THE JOB. THE DELAY IN APPOINTING HIM WAS SIMPLE AND POLITICAL: HEATH AND HIS ADVISERS FELT THAT CHANGES AT THE TOP OF THE PARTY HIERARCHY SHOULD NOT BE CARRIED OUT UNTIL THE DANGER OF A SUMMER ELECTION HAD PASSED. THE SAME FACTORS HAVE ALSO SLOWED DOWN VARIOUS SUGGESTIONS FOR THE REORGANIZATION OF THE PARTY'S CENTRAL OFFICE (THOUGH THE PROCESS BEGAN IN APRIL UNDER MICHAEL WOLFF WHO OCCUPIES A NEW POSITION AS DIRECTOR GENERAL OF CONSERVATIVE PARTY ORGANIZATION). OTHER CHANGES ANNOUNCED BY HEATH LAST WEEK WERE:

- JAMES PRIOR (SHADOW HOME AFFAIRS) TO EMPLOYMENT AFFAIRS. PRIOR RESIGNED HIS POSITION AS DEPUTY PARTY CHAIRMAN WHICH WILL LEAVE WHITELAW WITH ONLY ONE DEPUTY, MICHAEL FRASER, LONGTIME HEAD OF THE CONSERVATIVE CENTRAL OFFICE.
- KEITH JOSEPH (SHADOW CABINET, WITHOUT PORTFOLIO) TO SHADOW HOME AFFAIRS.
- FRANCIS PYM (SHADOW AGRICULTURE AND NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE) RELINQUISHES HIS NI RESPONSIBILITIES AND KEEPS HIS AGRICULTURAL ONES.
- MICHAEL JOPLING (WHIPS' OFFICE) TO ASSIST PYM ON AGRICULTURE.
- DAVID HOWELL, TO ASSIST ROBERT CARR AS TREASURY SPOKESMAN.
- MAURICE MACMILLAN (TREASURY SPOKESMAN) WHO RETURNS TO THE BACKBENCHES.

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- IAN GILMOUR (SHADOW DEFENSE AFFAIRS) WHO TAKES ON AN ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR OVERSEEING POLICY PLANNING IN THE CONSERVATIVE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT.

2. FOLLOWING ON THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THESE SHIFTS, PATY LEADER HEATH THIS WEEKEND MADE A VIGOROUS SPEECH SIGNALING, MANY BELIEVE, A CHANGE IN TORY TACTICS IN PARLIAMENT. HEATH TOLD A CONSERVATIVE PARTY CONFERENCE IN

WALES THAT HAVING AVOIDED THE LABOR TRAP OF A SNAP ELECTION, "IT IS IN THE HOME STRAIGHT THAT WE SHOULD NEED TO PILE ON THE PRESSURE BECAUSE THIS IS A RACE WHICH WE MUST WIN AND WIN DECISIVELY. WE CAN ALL BE PROUD THAT THROUGH THE LAST THREE MONTHS SINCE THE ELECTION WE HAVE KEPT OUR NERVE. SO THE BATTLE HONORS OF THIS PHONY WAR PERIOD HAVE GONE TO US..." HE PROCEEDED TO LAMBAST THE LABOR GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES, FOCUSING ON TAX RISES RESULTING FROM THE LABOR BUDGET AND LABOR'S "SOCIAL CONTRACT" WITH THE TRADE UNIONS WHICH HE CALLED "A CYNICAL ATTEMPT BY THE MINORITY LABOR GOVERNMENT TO BUY POWER BY MAKING A DEAL WITH ONE GROUP IN THE COMMUNITY AT THE EXPENSE OF ALL THE REST." HEATH STRESSED THAT THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY'S PLATFORM OFFERED A "CHARTER FOR ALL THE PEOPLE."

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3. A FACTOR UNDOUBTEDLY CONTRIBUTING TO HEATH'S APPARENT DECISION TO BEGIN TO MOVE TO THE OFFENSIVE HAS BEEN THE RECENT PUBLIC DISCLOSURE THAT MINISTER OF INDUSTRY TONY BENN HAS PLANS IN AN ADVANCED STAGE (THOUGH NOT YET APPROVED BY THE GOVERNMENT) TO EXTEND GOVERNMENT CONTROL OVER A LARGE NUMBER OF BRITISH FIRMS UNDER THE AEGIS OF A NATIONAL ENTERPRISES BOARD, THUS BRINGING FURTHER SIGNIFICANT

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ICANT SECTIONS OF THE BRITISH ECONOMY INTO PUBLIC OWNERSHIP AND/OR CONTROL. PREDICTABLY, A POLITICAL CONTROVERSY HAS ARISEN OUT OF THESE PROPOSALS. THOUGH THEY PLEASED THE LABOR LEFT WING, THEY HAVE ALARMED LABOR MODERATES WHO SEE THEM AS POTENTIALLY FRIGHTENING TO VOTERS WHEN THEY NEXT GO TO THE POLLS. IT HAS ALSO GIVEN THE OPPOSITION A POLITICALLY ATTRACTIVE EXCUSE TO TURN TO THE OFFENSIVE, IF IT CHOOSES.

4. THIS WEEK WILL SEE TWO ISSUES DEBATED IN COMMONS WHICH SHOULD TEST THE CHANGING POLITICAL AIR. ON JUNE 19 THERE WILL BE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION TO TRY, WITH LIBERAL SUPPORT, TO DEFEAT A CONTROVERSIAL FINANCE BILL PROVIDING REIMBURSING TRADE UNIONS FOR TEN MILLION POUNDS THEY FORFEITED IN TAX RELIEF BY REFUSING TO RECOGNIZE THE PREVIOUS INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ACT. THE SECOND ISSUE IS RELATED TO PLANS TO INCREASE RATES FOR CERTAIN CATEGORIES OF ELECTRICITY USAGE BY UP TO 70 PERCENT, A MOVE THAT LABOR BACKBENCHERS ARE KNOWN TO RESENT. IN AWARENESS THAT IT MAY SUFFER DEFEAT ON THESE ISSUES, THE GOVERNMENT HAS LET IT BE KNOWN IN ADVANCE THAT IT WILL NOT CONSIDER ADVERSE VOTES ON EITHER ONE AS A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE.

5. COMMENT: LORD CARRINGTON, WHO WILL REMAIN WITHOUT PORTFOLIO IN THE SHADOW CABINET, HAD MADE KNOWN SOME MONTHS AGO HIS DECISION TO RESIGN AS PARTY CHAIRMAN. WHITELAW, IN ANY EVENT THE MAN CURRENTLY MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED HEATH, WAS HIS LOGICAL SUCCESSOR AND THIS APPOINTMENT SHOULD STRENGTHEN THE PARTY AS IT ENTERS THE PRE-ELECTION PERIOD. IN SELECTING WHITELAW TO THE NUMBER

TWO POSITION IN THE PARTY, HEATH IS TAKING A CALCULATED RISK OF LOSING SOME OF HIS OWN AUTHORITY BECAUSE WHITELAW IS POPULAR AND HAS A SIGNIFICANT FOLLOWING IN THE PARTY AT LARGE AND AMONG PARTY FRONTBENCH LEADERS. NEVERTHELESS HE IS PERSONALLY LOYAL TO HEATH AND HE WILL BRING ENERGY AND A MEASURE OF APPEAL TO THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF THE PARTY WHICH IT BADLY NEEDS. HEATH HAS NEVER REALLY SUCCEEDED IN ACHIEVING PERSONAL POPULARITY EITHER IN PUBLIC OR IN THE PARTY'S RANKS, AND IF WHITELAW CAN HELP REMEDY THIS SITUATION, HEATH STANDS TO BENEFIT. THERE CONTINUES
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TO BE SOME CRITICISM BY CONSERVATIVES OF HEATH'S STYLE AND IMAGE AS A PARTY LEADER, BUT, BARRING HIS LOSS OF ANOTHER GENERAL ELECTION, HE SEEMS TO BE FIRMLY IN COMMAND AND SUPPORTED BY THE PARTY LEADERSHIP THAT COUNTS.

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